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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 000572

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/31/2014

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA'S NATIONAL ELECTIONS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS

REF: ABUJA 519

CLASSIFIED BY COUNSELOR JAMES MAXSTADT FOR REASONS 1.5 B AND 1D.

1. (C) Summary: Nigeria held its long-postponed (reftel) national round of Local Government Area (LGA) elections March 27. Overwhelmingly, whatever party ruled the state government also won the LGA elections in each state, not surprising as the "State Independent Electoral Commissions" (SIECs) are normally appointed by the state governors. Voter turnout averaged 15-20 percent in places where the elections were held. The preliminary report of Nigeria's NGO Transition Monitoring Group declared the LGA elections were fraught with massive fraud, and post expects there will be hundreds of suits in election tribunals. Around 50 people died in less violence than many Nigerians expected, scattered across the country. End Summary.

2. (C) LGA elections were held March 27 in most parts of Nigeria. The LGA elections were canceled in some states and some parts of other states, and the ruling PDP boycotted the elections in Zamfara and Lagos while the opposition AD did same in some parts of the Southwest. In addition to a shortage of and late arrival of election materials, the absence of an updated National Voter Register as required by law, and virtually no voter education, the LGA elections were marked by "irregularities." There were areas where the elections were not held but results were manufactured and "winners" declared. An opinion poll conducted by a Lagos-based influential Nigerian newspaper, the Guardian, showed that 91 percent of Nigerians believed the elections were not conducted in a free and fair manner.

VOTING IRREGULARITIES

3. (SBU) Virtually every voting irregularity known to democracies seemed to have been used in various places; SIECs barring most/all opposition candidates from running, ballot stuffing, voter intimidation, shortage of electoral materials, absurdly high nomination fees in many places, changed time/place of voting, false declaration of actual winners, and using party members to run the elections as SIEC staff were the most prevalent. The main difference between states seemed to be how much the ruling party in each was willing to leave to its opposition.

4. (U) In Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Kebbi, Zamfara, Bauchi, Benue, Ekiti, Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers states, the ruling parties captured all the LGA chairman seats and left only a few councillorships under them for the opposition. All parties seemed equally guilty. In Ogun, the PDP won all 20 chairmanship seats and took 230 councillorship positions to a paltry 4 for the ANPP. In Zamfara, ANPP candidates won all the chairman slots and left only one councillorship to APGA. In Lagos, AD managed to stop its in-fighting long enough to present lists of candidates, the PDP boycotted, and AD Lagos Governor Tinubu inducted 57 AD LGA chairmen -- including 37 from newly created LGAs -- on March 30. In other states like Katsina, Kano, Kaduna and Borno, opposition parties were allowed to win a handful of chairman seats. In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), which is not a state, the LGA election was run by the "Independent National Electoral Commission" and PDP and ANPP each won three chairman seats.

5. (SBU) Katsina state may take the prize for originality. With LGA elections so long postponed, state governments have long appointed civil servants to be "Caretaker" LGA Chairmen. As in the U.S., Nigerian law says civil servants must resign before running for election so they cannot use their bureaucracy to be elected to a post supervising that bureaucracy. Just before the election, Katsina passed a law allowing its civil-servant Caretakers an exception to having to resign one month before the election, and those who ran did not resign at all. Needless to say, the civil service Caretakers won. Needless to say, suits against their elections are on the way.

6. (U) The opposition umbrella Coalition of National Political Parties (CNPP) described the elections as "worse than 2003 general elections." In a statement released shortly after the elections, CNPP Secretary Maxi Okwu said, "every strategy was employed to foreclose the elections in

favor of ruling party candidates. These ranged from giving a head start to these candidates being appointed caretaker committee chairmen, prohibition and extortionist nomination administrative fees for candidates ranging to N250,000 and N100,000 (almost 2000 and 800 USD, far more than the yearly salary for the positions) for chairmanship and councillorship respectively, programmed tax clearance requirement demand of letters of identification from district heads; mass disqualification of opposition party candidates without reasons."

LOW TURNOUT

17. (SBU) In most places where there was an election, voter apathy kept turnout very low. Most observers believe the turnout ranged between 15-20 percent, although the official returns put turnout as high as 40-70 percent in some places. One refrain was often heard: "Why do we have to dissipate our time and energy when the winners have already been decided?" The opposition Conference of Nigerian Political Parties (CNPP) put it a different way, "By shunning the elections and staying put at home an overwhelming majority of Nigerians have passed a vote of no confidence on our electoral system and its managers."

18. (SBU) Like most places in Nigeria, Lagos State government directed that movement would be restricted during voting. LEGATT drove around and observed very few voters at the polling stations during the 7am-5pm voting hours. The most he saw were five at one station. A contact at the British Deputy High Commission told a Consulate employee that at one station where 1500 persons were registered, only 17 had actually shown up to vote. .

VIOLENCE

19. (SBU) Election-related violence was reported in most regions of the country, even though the LGA elections were canceled in places the authorities described as "having unfavorable security reports." The violence in most places was scattered and low-intensity, possibly due to the same voter apathy, although there were some larger-scale clashes in some places. Violence in Katsina state's Karadua town claimed at least 70 houses plus vehicles, motorcycles and other property. PDP supporters reportedly stormed the town on the eve of the elections carrying dangerous weapons and chanting "We control the government, so we must win," and attacked the residence of an ANPP candidate. ANPP supporters counterattacked. Earlier, on March 22, suspected PDP thugs at Batsari town in Katsina State had attacked the convoy of ANPP Presidential Candidate Muhammadu Buhari. No one was killed but scores of people were wounded.

110. (SBU) Elections results were suspended in Wukari, Takum and Ussa LGAs of Taraba state due to violence. Sources said that at least 2 people died while many houses were burnt in Wukari in protests that SIEC officials there had pronounced the PDP a winner after the vote totals suggested an opposition NDP candidate had won by a large majority. The incident renewed hostilities between the Jukun and Tiv ethnic groups even though both the candidates were Jukuns. It seems the Jukun NDP candidate was also backed by Tivs, Hausa/Fulani and young Jukuns. Authorities in neighboring Benue state had to rely on federal soldiers from Makurdi and Takum to restore order in seven Benue LGAs. Tiv militia killed five and injured many more in Kwande and Ukum, and in Zaki Biam armed youths numbering about 40 killed one man for "trying to challenge their order," while a stray bullet reportedly wounded Benue State Lands Commissioner Titus Madugu. Madugu's driver and police bodyguard were killed.

111. (U) Conflicts leading to loss of lives and property were reported at Owan and Esan East of Edo State. At Iruekpen, Nigerian First Lady Stella Obasanjo's hometown, supporters of PDP and ANPP had a bloody clash killing at least 2 people while setting ablaze many private homes. According to a journalist who monitored events "party thugs in mobile police uniform and others with uniforms of neighborhood watch (a government-sponsored group) paraded double-barreled and pump-action guns and fired indiscriminately."

112. (U) One student at Lagos State University (LASU) was killed in a demonstration at the Epe LGA offices. LASU students were protesting the defeat of a fellow student, who had run for LGA Chairman, and at first said that the deceased had been shot by police. An official examination of the corpse showed he had been stabbed with a sharp instrument.

113. (SBU) There were press reports that armed thugs halted the release of election results in Delta State, but the Delta State Commissioner for Foreign Relations, his Special Assistant and the Director of the Delta State Tourism Board told the Consul General and Pol/Econ officers that the

elections had transpired "peacefully." We have been unable to verify reports of ten houses being burned in Ondo and killings in Enugu and Oyo through police contacts.

14. (U) Hundreds of ANPP supporters blocked major roads and set bonfires in Zaria, north of Kaduna, to protest the declaration of a PDP winner of the LGA chairmanship election, claiming that their figures showed the ANPP candidate clearly won. Two people were reportedly killed while scores of party supporters were injured on Saturday following a clash between PDP and ANPP supporters at Jema'a and Bomo villages. Elections were suspended in Soba, Kaduna North and Ikara Local Governments.

15. (U) The same effect worked in the far fewer states where opposition party governors reign. PDP supporters in Maguemei of Borno state attacked and burnt state government buildings and vehicles, protesting that the ANPP-controlled state government had snatched away their "hard earned victory."
ROBERTS